UNITED
NATIONS

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Security Council

Distr.
GENERAL

S/23255
29 November 1991

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

SPECIAL REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE UNITED NATIONS INTERIM FORCE IN LEBANON

1. The purpose of this special report is to inform the Security Council of the circumstances in which an Irish soldier of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was killed on 15 November 1991. He was the one hundred and first casualty UNIFIL has suffered as a result of hostile action or duty-related accidents and the twenty-first such casualty suffered by the Irish contingent. The report also describes the recent increase in tension and hostilities in the UNIFIL area and neighbouring parts of southern Lebanon.

2. At 1715 hours local time on 15 November, the UNIFIL position at At Tiri in the Irish battalion area observed a de facto forces (DFF) patrol entering the village. In accordance with standard procedure, a five-man patrol was sent by the UNIFIL position to monitor the movements of the DFF patrol. At 1745 hours, when the UNIFIL patrol was returning to its position, three of its members came under rifle and machine-gun fire. The first burst killed a corporal and wounded a private soldier. Immediately thereafter two DFF positions in the vicinity fired thousands of machine-gun rounds to the area. After news of the incident reached the Irish battalion headquarters, two fully illuminated armoured personnel carriers, with flashing beacon lights, tried to reach the scene but were prevented from doing so by sustained machine-gun fire from DFF positions in the area.

3. As the two survivors, including the wounded man, were taken away by the DFF in an armoured personnel carrier, they were shown the body of a DFF soldier who, it was alleged, had been killed during the incident. After intervention by United Nations military observers of Observer Group Lebanon (OGL) the two soldiers were handed over to UNIFIL. Later, the Irish battalion was able to recover the body of the dead corporal, as well as the other two members of the UNIFIL patrol who were separated from their comrades when the firing began.

4. This incident has been strongly protested to the Israeli authorities both locally and in New York. UNIFIL is conducting a full investigation but has already established that no weapon was fired by any of the members of the

UNIFIL patrol and that the United Nations was not therefore responsible for the death of the DFF soldier. UNIFIL has also requested the Israeli authorities to inform it of the results of their own investigation.

5. This serious incident occurred in a period of heightened tension and hostilities in the UNIFIL area of operation. Recent months have witnessed an increase both in attacks by armed elements against IDF and DFF and in retaliatory action by the latter. UNIFIL has reported that clashes between the armed elements and IDF/DFF increased from an average of just over one per month during the first three months of the year to more than five per month during the subsequent period. Shooting incidents increased from an average of about 300 per month during the January-March period to about 450 per month during the subsequent months and reached 847 in the month of October.

6. According to media reports, there has been a similar increase in resistance activities and IDF/DFF retaliation north of the UNIFIL area of operation. A recent example was the detonation of a roadside bomb in Jarmaq on 20 October 1991, in which three IDF soldiers were killed and two others injured. In retaliation, IDF/DFF shelled and conducted air-strikes against the Nabatiyeh-Iklim Tuffah regions for five days.

7. In operations against IDF/DFF, an increased use of roadside bombs has been noted. Since April there have been an average of 5.7 roadside bombs per month, culminating in 15 such incidents in the month of October. IDF/DFF have reacted to roadside bomb attacks, especially when IDF/DFF personnel are killed or injured, by firing artillery and tank rounds into and around population centres close to where the bombs were detonated. In the UNIFIL area of operation, the villages of Tibnin, Majdal Silm, Brashit, Haddathah, Ayta Zutt and Qabrikha, all in the Irish battalion area, have been particularly affected. For instance, retaliatory fire by IDF/DFF, in response to a roadside bomb attack south of Brashit on 23 August 1991 lasted nine days and resulted in one civilian killed and four wounded. Faced with such intense shelling, the Lebanese populations in the villages under attack have fled for their safety. By 1 November 1991, about 70 per cent of the population of these villages were still absent. Since August, at least 11 Lebanese civilians have been killed and 30 wounded by roadside bombs and retaliatory fire. In a particularly tragic incident on 19 November 1991, IDF/DFF made an incursion into the UNIFIL area at Majdal Silm; they kidnapped four men and demolished two houses, injuring two women and three children; a 10-year-old girl who pleaded with the DFF personnel not to abduct her father was shot dead.

8. UNIFIL, many of whose positions are located in or close to the population centres, has been affected by these increased hostilities. Firings at or close to its positions increased from an average of about 6 per month in January-March to 22 per month in April-July and 68 per month in August-October. Almost all such close firings have been by IDF/DFF. They expose UNIFIL to the risk of further casualties and have been vigorously protested.

9. Most of the above-described hostilities have taken place near IDF/DFF positions that are close to population centres and in areas where UNIFIL's deployment overlaps the Israeli-Controlled Area (ICA). In order to reduce hostilities, to avoid further hardship to the civilian population and to prevent additional UNIFIL casualties, I have proposed to the Government of Israel that it withdraw IDF/DFF personnel from the most affected positions, which would then be taken over by UNIFIL. I am convinced that, as in the case of Tallet Huqban in October 1987 (S/19445), such a move would have a beneficial effect.